WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE BLIND

Annesley Burrowes

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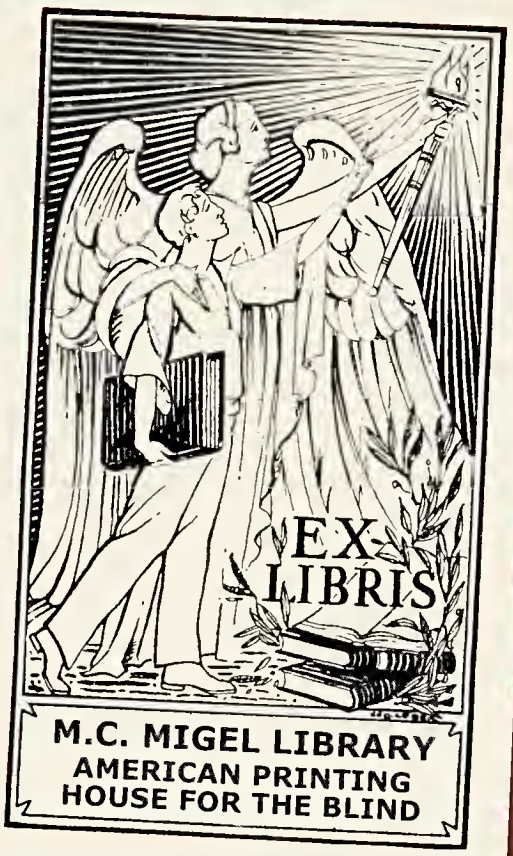
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WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE BLIND

By Annesley Burrowes

TO-DAY there is a great, growing, gripping curiosity about life as it is behind the veil of blindness, curiosity caused perhaps by the plight of the soldiers of France, soldiers of Britain, soldiers of Canada, and especially by the American soldiers whose eyes were shot out, blown out or bayoneted out on the battlefields of France and Belgium. Those who have known these men or heard of them or felt for them may perhaps welcome the message I give—that the life of the blind man need not be one of darkness, but may be one of hope, perhaps of happiness. I know, because I am blind, and yet happy.

Helen Keller wrote to me while I still lay in a Chicago hospital with my last eye raw from the surgeon's knife: "In your journey through the darkness you will touch many things that are sweet and beautiful and good." I have touched them, but not in the darkness. My journey has much color and many changes. It is one of the mistakes most people make—that the blind are always in the dark. And some blind people make it, too, because they have never seen, because they have never learned to tell darkness from light. I have been blind two years, and yet I am seldom in the dark. Sometimes I seem to stand in a world covered deep with glistening snow. Sometimes it seems as though I were in the midst of endless verdure, in shades from the darkest green to the most brilliant emerald. Sometimes there is nothing but ivory white, sometimes pearl gray. Sometimes as though I stood amid the brown smoke of burning forests. Sometimes I see a flat black, broken by great patches of dazzling white. Often, as I pause upon the street, I seem to stand in the center of a pale immensity stretching away on all sides into illimitable horizons.

Poets talk about the veil of blindness, but there is no veil. A veil can be seen. I see nothing but a vast emptiness. And yet my elbows are touched by garments as they pass. Footsteps come and go. I hear the clang of gongs, the rush of traffic, the talk and laughter of women and children. All about me I feel the current, the quiver of life, of trees, birds, animals and men; and yet I seem to stand alone looking into an immeasurable, unpeopled nothingness. It gives one a queer feeling, almost uncanny, yet not distressing.

"I Saw Something Thick and Green Dropping Down Over My Vision Like the Drop Curtain in a Theater." Above—Mr. Burrowes' Camp on the St. John's River, Florida, Which He Set Up With the Aid of Inexperienced Negroes Three Months After Becoming Totally Blind

How Blindness Came

THE experience of being blind is an interesting one, but the process of getting blind is more interesting still. Of course there are all ways of getting blind. I knew a policeman who lost his sight in a fight with burglars. They rapped the back of his head against the pavement, and when he came to he was as blind as an iron dog. The blow had jarred the retina off both his eyes. You can blind yourself almost any day by walking into a close hot room and sitting down beside a basin of wood alcohol. Or you can accomplish the same result by drinking the alcohol.

I became blind in two hours from a cause which no doctor was ever able to find out. In those days I paddled a canoe. I feel half ashamed to mention that, for fear somebody should take me for the kind of canoeman who freights his frail craft with forty-five pillows, a phonograph and a girl, and pushes it along after the fashion of a gondola. I plead guilty to four cushions and an occasional girl, but on the whole I was the kind of canoeist who wanted to hike—to climb the high waves of Huron and Erie and to fight the seething rivers of unsettled Canada. Also, I used my canoe as a workshop. On this lovely June morning, with my little craft ballasted with a pail of ice and a case of liquid refreshment, I had paddled to a shady nook, stretched a board across the gunwales, set upon it a small typewriter, and was busily hammering out a scenario which in after months was resolutely turned down by every movie manager to whom I dared offer it. A little later, while I was busily registering all kinds of emotions, I noticed something thick and green edging out from below my left eyelid. There was no uneasiness, not the slightest pain—only that thick green thing crept lower over my sight, like the drop curtain at a theater. It took two hours to fall, after which I took something off the ice and ate lunch. Afterward the green faded out of the curtain and it became gray with occasional lapses into other colors. I never saw through that eye again.

I never missed that eye because I had another left, and one eye is just as good as a hundred; in fact, I have often marveled at Nature's extravagance in bestowing two perfectly good eyes on a single individual. One can readily see the necessity of two arms, two legs or even two ears. But why two eyes? Of course a second eye comes in handy when the first has been lost, but on that basis it would seem only fair to have provided every man with four legs. How inexpressibly convenient to one whose regular legs had, say, been bitten off by a shark, could he on reaching shore put a pair of boots on his unemployed feet and walk off as though nothing had happened. Then in the matter of teeth—how infinitely more useful had Providence outfitted each man with spare teeth. There are few men who could not get through life very well with one eye, but alas, how few of us are able to carry our own teeth with us to the grave. What a blessing to humanity could men at the age of fifty superannuate their worn-out teeth and recall out reserves of teeth to continue the battle against beef and bread.

This waste of eyes seems one of the inexcusable errors which Nature has committed against her children. When I contemplate the world, which I shall never see again, and think of the millions of people who are carrying round millions of superfluous eyes while others like myself haven't even half an eye, it makes me a rebel against Fate. If Nature with all the billions of eyes in her store had only let me keep my one last eye—how much I should have owed her. But she took it.

The Very Beginning

SO MANY people like to hear the beginning of things. "When did it begin?" they ask me. I tell them it began forty years before I was born; or perhaps four hundred years. In the latter half of that period my father was in the prime of young manhood. Those were the days when men went about their affairs in shirt collars that reached their ears, and high hats. They called them beaver hats, because the silkworm had not yet bored his way into the hatters' trade. My father used to go to bed each night with his high beaver hat on a table close beside him. And when he woke in the morning he would sit up in bed, clap his beaver on his brown curls and roar for soda water—not the sweet kind that you get at the fountain, but that old dry kind that tasted so cool and good when you had spent the preceding evening with a circle of merry friends round the punch bowl.

And when the soda came he would reach under the pillow, pull out a bit of glass with a gold band round it, screw it in his right eye, and there it remained all day. He called it his eyeglass. They call it a monocle now. When he engaged himself to marry, what more natural than that his young fiancée should take this monocle, screw it into her own eye, and glance coquettishly at her loved one. Then she smiled delightedly, for never before had he seemed so handsome. There were questions—explanations. Then she knew for the first time that she, too, was shortsighted. Next evening he came, bringing a second bit of glass circled with gold, and after that my father and mother went through life with a pair of spectacles halved between them. That was the beginning, so far as I knew, of my blindness.

Twenty years afterward my mother, buying herself a monocle in a distant city, bethought to buy me a pair

"He wasn't born dumb and Doctor Case thinks something could be done for him. Walter's twenty. Now, let's see. He's from some place in Indiana and his mother was a cousin of McCurdy's—no, his father. Let me get it straight. Well, his dad was away from home and the boy was sleeping in some kind of attic—the top of the house, anyhow—and the place took fire in the night, so his mother lost her head and didn't think of him until after she'd run for help. All this time the poor pup was trying to get down out of his attic and not getting very far. He was nine. The fire burned the stairs and he jumped down into a tree. Hasn't spoken since. He's all right every other way. His folks are dead. He works down at the forge. It's a pity something can't be done. I wonder if he'd go back to New York with you?"

I had made some studies of aphonia at medical school and we discussed the matter while I damaged my liver with the judge's sherry. But people came calling and it was close to Monday noon when I walked down Poplar Street to the drowsy square for a chat with Peter Vanois at the bakery, where the rolls in the showcase had the immutable seeming of marble and Mrs. Vanois was still humming some Gascon song to herself while she knitted garments for Peter's baby.

"What d'you think of Judy Patterson?" Peter inquired.

I delayed an answer until I saw Mrs. Vanois smile civilly aside, then laughed, and Peter assented.

"Of course, everybody's mighty fond of Judy. She's a nice sort of girl, but—well!"

"It is very 'orreeble," said his mother. The Bordeaux street singers, she went on, were not more offensive to her ear, and she thanked God that Judy's efforts would be restricted to a Protestant area. But as a friend of the family one could say nothing.

"And old Patterson's mortgaged the store and everything he's got to send her to Boston. Better go buy a pot of paint, Joe, and help him out," Peter suggested. "Patterson's got it all thought out. She'll sing in the Presbyterian choir all summer, then she'll go to New York, and then—he thinks—it'll be 'bout a week when she comes back in a private car with rubies for tail lights. He thinks she'll bust right into the Metropolitan Opera and raise the roof."

"I can hear the chandeliers falling," murmured Mrs. Vanois, "and I see Madame Eames, who tears out her hair with envy."

"That's all right, mamma," Peter drawled in the tongue of Zerbetta. "Who was it wanted me to be a sculptor 'cause I made horses out of pie dough, huh?"

Mrs. Vanois admitted that all parents were fools. However, Morton Patterson was of a stupidity unexampled even among the accursed Germans. Her French went too fast for me and I sauntered on down Clarke Street, passing shops where few signs were changed since I trotted errands for my mother. Morton Patterson's Paint and Oils Store was changed, if at all, for the worse. I thought an expenditure of a gallon on his own brick would come well in place. The family must still live in the rooms above the gilt signboard, for a geranium box was being watered on a sill and I heard Judith singing tenderly, in the voice of her old solos when a children's party needed that distraction. She was singing Eileen Aroon, and its soft sentiment dripped pleasantly down on me with drops from the geranium. I conjured up Miss Randall, happily unaware that she was just then having measles in London, and entered the shop ready to argue Morton Patterson limp.

He sprang from a chair in the rear and hobbled eagerly forward, not, as I fancied, to shake hands but to wait on me, for he did not know me at once and I saw a hopeful glow sink in his eyes as I told him I was Joe Henry. Still he seemed glad to see me and began to talk of New York with an instant direction. Did I go to the opera? Was it hard for a girl with good letters of introduction to have her voice heard? Letters from a celebrated Boston master? My desire to laugh gave way before his silly pride, and I stood lying until Judith's skirt fluttered on the stairs and she came to meet me, genially declaring I had winked at her in church. Near by she was most unlike Miss Randall, but a pretty, fragile thing, and we settled to a comfortable talk of Boston. Patterson broke in proudly with small babblings about the teacher who had prophesied so much for her. Her mouth twitched at each phrase.

"Maybe Joe doesn't care for music, daddy," she said at last and made a skillful shift to Judge Lowe's rheumatism. I lounged against a shelf of paint cans while we gossiped, and the time slid on without a single customer while Patterson dozed in his chair, a yesterday's Cincinnati Enquirer spread on his knees and his loose lips smiling. But he jumped as the door banged. Walter McCurdy nodded to me and blushed for Judith so that I warmed fraternally, wondering how he managed a courtship on these terms. The sunny window made his head romantic and I envied the fair curls as he reached down a jar of some oil from a shelf and found a quarter in the pocket of his leather apron.

"Well, Walter," said Patterson rather stiffly, "I saw you in church."

"And I hope you're not being worked to death," the girl smiled. "It's a shame that horse bit Mr. McCurdy."

He grinned, foolishly flexing his naked biceps, and the ancient staled ballad hopped into my mouth. The smith, a mighty man was he. The muscles of his brawny arms were strong as iron bands. I doubted that Walter could be worked to death, though the McCurdy smithy was the only one in town, since Bill McCurdy always bought off rivals or, given the backing of a little liquor, drove them out with blows. I hoped the boy was a milder character. He did not stay to be admired, and the sun made his bare shoulders gleam as he strode off down the plank sidewalk, balancing the heavy jar on a palm.

"He oughtn't go round like that," Patterson commented sourly, "in an apron and pants. It isn't refined."

"He's mighty handsome," I said, "and I'll bet he could break rocks on his chest. It's a shame he's dumb."

Patterson thought that Walter would have very little to say for himself if he could talk. And anyhow he wasn't anything but a blacksmith's helper. Wasn't it true that lots of grand-opera stars married dukes and so on?

"Oh, daddy," Judith said with a faint wail in her voice, "don't be so silly!"

"Well, now," he beamed, "it's all right being modest, Judy, but let's ask Joe if you haven't got as good a soprano as any ——"

"Joe never was any sort of a liar, daddy. You don't have to answer, Joe," she cried.

"But didn't Professor Rothschild write me that ——"

I gulped thankfully as some farmer came stamping in for a paintbrush, and I hurried down the street, glad that

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Walter Walked Down the Rungs, With Judy, Wrapped in a Pink Quilt, Held High in His Arms

of spectacles. She brought them home when I was eleven years old. They opened a new world to me. Presently they broke, and I bought myself a new pair. Physician—oculist—optometrist? Who thought of such people in those times? Doctors were to saw off legs, cure the scarlet fever. As for eyes—pouf! Each man was his own optometrist, his own oculist. I used to march into a drug store, plank down three dollars, pick out a pair of glasses as though they were a pair of gloves, focus them on the signs across the street, and then use them to pore over my dictionary and spelling book by the light of a flickering gas jet. I never knew what an oculist was until I was twenty-one years old. He told me I would probably be blind in twenty years, and advised me to cut out books. I did so and took up dancing and other pleasures. Those eyes lasted just two years longer than the doctor promised. Then, at the height of my journalistic success, I was forced to turn out and begin life again. I was not yet blind. I did not entirely give up writing, for I was never able to do that. But my newspaper career was past. It was six years later when that green curtain crept down over my sight, that day when I was hammering out an unsalable scenario in my canoe among the lily pads and the lilies.

With the eye that still remained to me I saw many strange things, for the process of growing blind is an entertaining one. Looking into the midnight sky I always saw three moons, joined so that they looked like the ace of clubs—in contour, of course, not in color. The moons increased in number. Toward the last they looked like a large and luscious bunch of grapes. The stripes on my shirt cuffs took strange geometric patterns.

"I Loved That Eye. It Brought Me Everything of Beauty an Eye Could Find"

The Good Eye Begins to Go

IF I LIGHTED a match it was surrounded by an aura as big as a dollar and as brilliant as a pinwheel. When I looked toward an arc light I saw an aura big enough and round enough to make a turntable for a locomotive. It was made of light shafts of the most dazzling green, shot with reds and yellows and surrounded at its outer edge with splendid rings of red, blue and gold. A dozen of these made a display worth going miles and paying an admission fee to look at. I once knew a blind man whose eyes were always full of sights like these, only they moved. His wheels turned round with frightful rapidity, and there were jets of spouting fire. He needed no matches to set off his display. The wheels circled and the jets spouted until he went almost mad, and the doctors cut out both his eyes. It gave no relief, and the wheels continued to spin. After that the man became reconciled to his private display of pyrotechnics, and forgot to notice them.

During these years the fading of my sight had interfered only a little with the pleasure of living. My one eye was doing valiant service. Its sight was very, very short; but, after all, the shortsighted man is not badly off. Spectacles will help him; so will an opera glass, and I carried a tiny one in my waistcoat pocket. People stared a bit when I used it, but what matter? Curious people must have their stare. But aside from mere length of vision that one eye was a wonder. Nothing escaped that came within its range. The faces, the hats, the dogs, the babies, the windows and the motor cars—that eye saw them all. I couldn't walk half a mile without seeing something to think about or talk about or laugh about. I loved that eye and enjoyed it. It brought me everything of beauty an eye could find; and beauty always delighted me—beauty of men, beauty of women, of dogs, of horses, of trees, of houses, of clouds; the deep magenta of the sumac; the red flaming of autumn maples; cypress and Spanish moss blooming over Southern swamps; cold white moonlight striking into forest vistas; a brown crumpled leaf floating under bare trees on a gray-green stream; blue-topped mountains and billowing cataracts; the glimmer of snow over dark earth; golden sunset glowing through tall white birches on a black Northern lake. These and other sights are what my eye brought me. They still live, and still come to fill the great emptiness that Nature has cast about me. But the pictures are all old. There are no new ones, and never will be. At this point the famed ejaculation of Mr. Poe's bird of night might appropriately be made.

And now the good old eye which had stayed by me for half a lifetime began to lose its usefulness. A cataract was creeping over it, one of those leathery growths that thicken until sight is extinguished. Very slowly, very gradually the world was retreating from me. When I mislaid things they were hard to find again. A white collar on a white cloth was lost to me. I might pass a black chair a dozen times and never see the black hat which I had put there. Steps became a problem. They looked flat and I must descend gingerly. A man with his back to a window was a mere silhouette. He might be a blond dude or a black waiter. I began to pass friends without knowing them. At social gatherings I had to stare painfully before recognizing an acquaintance. It became embarrassing and I withdrew from such gayeties. From the second row of the parquet I could no longer distinguish the faces upon the stage. Once or twice at photoplays of merit I asked leave to sit among the musicians. Then I stopped going.

Success in Writing

IT REQUIRED two hours to look over a newspaper that I had once scanned in twenty minutes. In crossing streets I had to keep from shadows, for one of them might conceal a coming motor car. When I entered the shadow I could no longer see into the sunlight. After the night had fallen I hesitated at street corners. I was not afraid of the glaring headlights which annoyed so many people. I liked them. It was the worn-out dashlights that bothered me. They rushed at me out of the darkness, and I must jump to avoid them. Once I did not jump soon enough, and the half-lighted car hurled me into the arms of a friend whom I had not met for twenty years. After that I waited at busy street corners and begged passers-by to lead me across.

And yet during this period I came back. The ideas, the observations, the thoughts that had accumulated in my mind during years of journalistic inaction began to come out again in the form of popular essays which local newspapers bought eagerly. I received higher prices than I had ever hoped for. My name was played up in headlines half an inch high. My stuff was read and discussed, and commented on in other prints. I was successful, but it was not to last.

My earlier friends died or drifted away from me. I saw fewer and fewer people and lived to myself more and more. It was a gradual preparation for the days of loneliness when I should see no friends—or almost none. I became reconciled to it. There were other things. I could still read after a fashion, and the doctors said I need no longer deny myself. The sky was as blue as ever and the sunlight still danced upon the water. I still went out in my canoe and felt my way through winding waterways. Sometimes when the night was heavy I seemed to be floating in black midair. I could not see the water that rippled beneath my boat or the trees on either side. But above the trees was the starry sky. It wound, too, like the river below, and I could steer by its direction. Once or twice I lost myself in black darkness, but I blundered on through the gloom until at last I blundered into the right way. There was no danger, it was not deep; but I no longer dared outer and wilder waters.

"Every Night I Watched the Red Sun Going Down Behind the Water"

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THE LITTLE MORE

Lady Violet Was an Erratic Driver at Best, and Ozzie Was Not Enjoying Himself

The little more and how much it is.—BROWNING.

By Leonora Speyer

ILLUSTRATED BY JAMES M. PRESTON

LADY VIOLET'S canary-yellow little car sped through the English lanes with a nervous recklessness that seemed to fit in with Lady Violet's decidedly perturbed mood. She was an erratic driver at best, and Ozzie was not enjoying himself, though to be with Lady Violet was the great purpose and pleasure of his life—had been for six years, ever since he had met her at Ascot, he frankly admitted.

"It's getting worse all the time," she said, avoiding a furniture van that loomed up unexpectedly round a leafy curve, by one of the supreme miracles of life.

Ozzie's position was a trying one. Lady Violet was suffering an acute attack of what she called husbanditis, which meant there was a difference of opinion between her and Sir George; and on these occasions Ozzie was supposed to hold Lady Violet's hand with a subtle blend of tender camaraderie and strong man's passion, and just understand—letting Lady Violet do most of the talking.

The former was quite out of the question of course, as she was driving, and Ozzie felt the latter to be distinctly dangerous in Lady Violet's present state of health, for the same reason.

"Why shouldn't I have Ferdie down two Sundays runnin', as George calls it? Let 'em run! And Ferdie's a genius! Anybody with a soul above huntin' and shootin' would thrill at the thought of having Ferdinand Green composing under his very roof!"

She bethought herself of the brake not one second too soon. When Ozzie recovered he spoke.

"Perhaps it was a mistake to put a piano in his bedroom," he said.

"What nonsense! He must have a piano in his bedroom! All géniuses do! And I got all the scratches off George's damned old oak—or rather Biles did. The car is not running well this morning, Ozzie. Have you noticed?"

For a moment Lady Violet assumed a contemplative expression, reminding one vaguely of a chauffeur's.

"Couldn't you suggest that he doesn't play at four A. M.?" asked Ozzie.

Lady Violet turned and looked at him. It was a disapproving look and the car swerved violently toward the side of the road with the force of it.

"You're an ass, dear thing. Of course I can't suggest any such absurd arrangement. Besides, it's divine listening to Ferdie's music floating through one's dreams! George ought to be ashamed of himself."

Ozzie grinned. But Lady Violet maintained a stoic calm.

"George is a bore! I hate to say it, Ozziekins, it grieves me to the heart, but George is a bore—and I am a wretched, wretched woman."

"I like him," said Ozzie stoutly. "He's a topping good sort. I like him quite as much as Ferdie, Vi! And what's more, so do you! I'd like to hear anyone else call George a bore in your presence! Look out!"

Lady Violet whisked by a high two-wheeled cart, barely grazing one of the wheels.

"Wasn't that old Colonel Pritchard?" she asked happily. "Poor old thing, I really must ask him to tea some day."

She drove through the gates of the Sussex Golf Club and slowed up at the first green with great style and precision.

In the meantime Sir George and Eve Sartoris were galloping over the Downs. Eve rode carelessly, a little slouchily; she was if anything too much at home on a horse, but she was the real English horsewoman for all that, perhaps because of that. They pulled up their panting animals by common unspoken assent and stood looking across the green slopes, the stretch of yellow sand beyond, the glittering thread of sea in the distance.

"It's good to see you on a horse," he said, and edged nearer to her. "I believe every mount in my stable knows your hand and is glad, Eve!"

She threw him a happy glance, then grew serious and sighed a little. "That's the tragedy of it," she answered and put her hand gently on her horse's neck.

"What's tragic about it?"

"Oh, not having all the horses I want! Not having any, in fact! Just exercising my friends' horses!"

"I say Eve! That's not kind. You can ride any horse of mine whenever you want to, here or in town. You know that, don't you?"

"I'm sorry," she answered penitently. "Yes, dear George, I know that. You are always so darling to me—you and Vi—only sometimes ——"

She touched her horse ever so lightly with her crop and they were off again.

"I hear Lady Margaret is coming down this afternoon," she said as they cantered up the drive that led to the fine old house.

"So Vi tells me," he answered a little dubiously. "She's just out of jail, I believe."

Eve laughed.

"She hunger-struck. I even think she was forcibly fed! She must tell us all about it."

"She will—probably before the servants! Every harrowing detail." And Sir George lapsed into rather a gloomy silence.

"Is Ferdinand Green coming?" Eve asked.

"Of course. The piano was tuned this morning. Vi and I discussed the necessity of the piano in the bedroom at great length."

Again the silence.

"Poor George. Cheer up, old friend. Ferdie's much better than Moroni! Always remember that. What became of Moroni, by the way?"

"Oh, Vi discovered that he was a rotter—mercifully before he painted the old kitchen wall blue and put mirrors in it! He disappeared. I believe he made Italian love to Vi one day, and that did for him." And Sir George lit a cigarette calmly.

II

FERDIE GREEN arrived at tea time. He was tall and thin, wore plush waistcoats and strange-looking ties made out of silks and satins which he bought himself by the yard and had carefully copied from an early Victorian model, and in his pale deep eyes was the light of one who is listening to sounds heard only by himself. He was distinctly gifted, cheerfully sure of his genius and of its ultimate recognition, very happy about it all. And when he was not thinking of himself he was thinking of Lady Violet.

She had told him all about the incident of the piano and the scratched oak—as a matter of fact it was rather badly damaged and Sir George had been extremely patient about it—and Ferdie had immediately offered to write a string quartet and dedicate it to him; began it that very night, in fact.

"Must he play in the middle of the night?" Sir George had asked Lady Violet the next morning.

"Considering that he is composing a string quartet and that he is dedicating it to you I think you're pretty ungrateful," replied Lady Violet.

Sir George had memories of a Monday pop at St. James' Hall which he had unwittingly attended years before, having absent-mindedly followed a stream of people up the steps at the right, upon entering the building, instead of going down other steps at the left, where the Christie Minstrels were performing. He had hated the very name "quartet" ever since, and the idea of having the rum thing dedicated to him was an abhorrent one.

"Pretty ungrateful!" repeated Lady Violet, and turned away. But at the door she felt sorry for him—souls in outer darkness are piteous things. "You see," she added

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the lines of raised type. She told of men who tottered babylike as they took first lessons in walking, and who thought a journey round the block a vast achievement. I knew I was not going to totter, because already, while my bandages were on and before the doctor's verdict had been delivered, I learned to find my way about the room and the corridor. Then and there I resolved to lean on nobody's shoulder and to weep on nobody's hand.

Twelve weeks after the doctor's knife had cut away my sight I left the hospital and traveled home alone. During these first days I bumped my head against doors, stumbled into footstools, and bruised my skin against the sharp corners of tables. I didn't mind that. A friend took me out to walk. I did not totter as the California lady described her male pupils doing. I felt no timidity. The next day I went out by myself. But here I must admit something. I had a little sight left. I could see a glimmer of the sidewalk. It looked like nothing more substantial than a wreath of tobacco smoke, but I knew there was solid concrete underneath it, so I threw up my head, squared my shoulders and started out at a swinging march. But it did require some nerve. In places the guiding smoke wreath seemed quite thick, and the going was not so hard. But sometimes it was very thin, and sometimes paled off into nothingness. Then I felt as though I was walking a tight rope in midair, but I pushed on. I knew the concrete was there. I stumbled over invisible dolls' carriages and barked my shins painfully against pointed wagons that older boys use. Once my stick touched a solid object, and stooping down I found a great building stone, two feet long and ten inches through, which careless boys had left there. I rolled it off the walk and tramped on.

That good old eye of mine, wrecked and ruined as it was, still tried to show me things. It carried no form, no shapes, no outlines to my brain, but it gave me queer unnatural colors in great irregular splotches. A street car, for example, looked like a great splash of vivid gold, beginning nowhere, ending nowhere, having no form, no substance—just color. Where a dirty gray flight of steps was, lay a splotch of cobalt blue looking like anything but a flight of steps. I could not see where to put my foot; I had to grope for that spot as if it were midnight. The sky was so brilliant that it was like looking into the face of the midday sun, even though the day were cloudy. All this was without real value. It gave no practical help, but life was the brighter for it.

Visiting Fellow-Sufferers

I wanted to meet other blind men and learn how they lived, so I traveled alone to the state institute for the blind. A truckman met me at the station, loaded me and my baggage into his vehicle, and at last herded me up some stone steps and under cover. Then he went away, leaving me stranded on a sofa that had very little upholstery on it and an extraordinary number of disabled springs. After a long time a bunch of blind and half-blind workmen came in from the broom factory and I was introduced, paying my footing with Egyptian cigarettes. I met one chap who was deaf, dumb and blind. He wanted to feel me all over to find what I looked like, and I let him. It seemed to me he deserved it. Afterward I learned that blind people have a passion for touching those whom they meet. Sometimes the wish is so intense as to be almost irresistible and they must fight it down to avoid offending. This poor fellow, with but three senses left him, could not help gratifying the sense of touch. Also he made me tell my history from the cradle onward, while a benevolent friend translated by hand pressure.

After this I was towed across the campus to the dining hall by a totally blind workman, who turned corners, negotiated steps, and marched away as easily as though he had fourteen eyes of the best quality. I was never able to see anything admirable in this institution except the heating apparatus and the girl who managed the library. People told me she was bright and pretty. I don't know. But I shook hands with her, and can testify that those hands were extremely small and shapely. Her voice had a ring of happiness in it, even of joy. She tore up and down stairs with cargoes of books in her arms that would have made a mule look askance. Her body seemed made of wire and steel springs. She rattled her typewriter with miraculous speed. She filed or produced records as deftly as a conjurer pulling rabbits from his hat. She was never tired, never cross. She had always been having the time of her life or was going to have it next week.

And yet that girl had never seen the light of day. She had never seen a tree or a flower or a human face. Of course she had conceptions—conceptions of everything in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath, and the waters under the earth. But how far did they resemble the realities that passed before her closed eyes? No man could tell, because between the sighted and those born blind there are no standards of comparison. When I touch an orange or a pine cone I can see it in my mind as clearly as though I had a score of eyes, because I have touched and seen pine cones often, and the touch recalls the vision. But what of this girl who had no vision to recall? What monstrous or fantastic or beauteous shapes were called up before her by the touch and the sounds of the things about her. What did she see in that active little brain when she heard the singing of birds, or the ripple of water, or the storm lashing the forest, or the shriek of whistles and clang of alarm bells, or the roar of streets and market, or the cries of players at a game, or the murmur of voices and swish of silk as men and women circle to the strains of music? To her mind men and women may look like the pea-green monsters in the visions of Little Nemo or like the angels in Henry Van Dyke's descriptions of heaven. On the whole, I am inclined to think that this girl's visions were pleasant ones. If not she could never have seemed so happy.

But They Sounded Good

I never knew what the men in the home looked like—down in the smoking room or on the benches on the lawn. Once I asked the lady who made the beds and swept the bedrooms. "Gee!" she answered solemnly, "you ought to see 'em together. They're a fierce bunch!" It may have been true. When forty-five blind men live together, with not a human being to care how they look, what they wear, how they keep themselves, they are apt to grow a bit careless as to the color of their teeth or the amount of their whiskers. Blind men do not judge others by their appearance, and if they forget their own sometimes it is not unnatural. These fellows looked good to me, because they sounded good. There wasn't an indecent voice among them all. There was no foul language, no obscene stories, no quarreling, no meanness. If some of them had unbeautiful features their souls were perhaps cleaner than those of their critics. They were cheerful, easy-going. Every man there was willing to help another.

We had some grand powwows down there in the smoking room or on the lawn benches. There was Joe, who used to travel with a one-ring circus in the old days, and who still sang Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines and other comics of the vintage of 1868. He was as blind as a hitching post and partly deaf, but he had a joke for every minute in the day, and his jokes were the kind that make laughter. There was old Keppler, with a thousand stories of the wild days when he had worked in the mines or prospected for precious metals in the hills of Montana. There was Dave Dineen, a lion-hearted man with tales of bears and big game in far northern forests, stories of the survey and the logging camp, whose eyes at last had been dashed out by a flying belt in an automobile factory. There was little Wilson Murch, who played the piano like a wizard. I once heard a manufacturer say that it would be impossible for a blind man to work at a bench where he had to take bits of metal from one slot and put them in another with considerable rapidity. Here was a man who had eighty-eight slots, black and white, on his bench, and who could strike any of them or any dozen of them with the accuracy and speed of a pneumatic riveter.

Then there was George Shotwell, a young giant whose eyes had been scalded out of his face by drops of white-hot iron. I don't know how George looked, but he made a noise like a fair-haired, blue-eyed, clear-featured captain of cavalry, ready to lead his troop into any kind of a fight on any kind of occasion. His muscles were like pliant steel bands, his voice rang like a trumpet. His laugh would make a corpse prick up its ears and snicker. When he went upstairs or came down he galloped like a war horse in a charge. His heels rattled against the steps like a discharge of musketry. I don't believe he ever realized his blindness, because he went through life like a man with a bushel of eyes. On one occasion he charged across the campus all alone to tackle a burglar, when he heard one of the officials blowing a police whistle out his window and screaming for help. The marauder made his escape before the blind fighter reached the scene, which proved that he was a lucky burglar.

Compared with these men the high-ups in the administration building were pale nonentities. And these forty-five blind men, with a great city teeming round them, lived as much to themselves almost as if they had been on a desert island in midocean. Visitors came and stared at the stately pillars and handsome furnishing of the official building and wondered at the generosity of a great state toward its afflicted ones, but they got no farther. They did not enter the bare building where the blind workmen spent their leisure alone. None came to talk, to teach, to sympathize or to entertain. One woman paid by the state spent one hour each evening reading a brief sketch of the day's news to those who would listen, and often out of the goodness of her heart she gave another hour free, and read articles or stories from current magazines. A debating society, a dancing meet, a gymnasium club, a concert evening or even a spelling circle might have helped to make these men more human than they were, but there were none of them.

Immediately after Christmas I shot back to Florida—back to my old camp on the bank of the St. John's River, where I and my one eye had passed so many lonely happy days together. In the city of Jacksonville I felt my way through the streets alone, but paused at busy crossings to ask a moment's guidance. I went alone by trolley and found my way along the sand road that led to the well-remembered spot.

I set up three big tents, two of which were of complicated design, and for this I had only the aid of a negro carpenter and his helper, neither of whom had ever handled a tent before. I did almost none of the actual work, but I directed everything, touched everything and explained what was to be done with it. This was just two months after my release from hospital, and some blind men say it is a record. George Shotwell, the young war horse of the institute, told me he was still cowering indoors three months after his release, and that he did not dare the streets alone until eight months after his first blindness. It took us three days to get the tents on their legs, the floors down, the stoves up and the furniture in. I touched everything as it came off the wagons and pointed to its place. It was a nerve-racking operation. I don't know of anything more trying than to sit helpless listening to two negroes doing a job in half an hour which a white man with half an eye and a little experience could do in five minutes.

A Blind Man's Camp Life

I remained in that camp four months with one companion. A colored woman came each day to cook and keep house for us. I could see the sky or rather its blueness. I could see no clouds. I could not see the water. The treetops showed only as black bulks against the blue. Standing within ten feet of my tent, which was as big as many a house, I could see something white, but it had no shape. I had to feel for the entrance. I could make my way along the sand trail to the cross-roads store partly by feeling the ruts with my feet, partly by watching the tree tops as I used to do when paddling my canoe of a dark night.

Often I strayed off the road and lost myself among the trees. Then I just had to push round until I came right again or shout for help when I heard a team passing. I was never bashful about telling my troubles to the atmosphere. When I came to the store a quarter of a mile from my camp I could not see even its color, because that was neutral, but I could hear the rattle of scales or the sound of voices. If there was no noise I stood still and shouted. After making purchases the storeman would lead me out, point me in the right direction, and I would trudge back to where I thought the camp ought to be. Then I shouted and somebody would respond, after which I felt my way through the trees to where the voice came from. I hear that a compass has been invented which will ring a buzzer whenever

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the owner's feet deviate from the straight line of march. It would have been a grand little companion for me.

I did a little of everything round that camp. I made occasional tea and toast, fixed recalcitrant oil stoves, sawed and split some wood, drove in tent pegs, and was entirely responsible for the hundred or so ropes which held the tents up. My dish-washing was considered a marvel. These duties were performed entirely by sense of touch. My glimmer of sight was quite useless for practical work of any kind. The sense of touch—feeling, as people call it—is really a marvelous thing. There are hundreds of cases in which fingers are better than eyes. In this same dishwashing I could feel particles of dirt which few eyes could see. I could almost guess the age of a man by holding his hand and passing my hand over his face. I can tell one fabric from another the moment I touch it. It would be hard to place any object in my hand without my instantly knowing what it was. Sighted people are often astonished at these things, and one of their favorite questions is "How did you learn it?" The answer is: "I never learned it. It was there." The knowledge that I use now began to creep into my brain while I was still in swaddling clothes. It has been creeping in all through my life. It will creep on until I die. Every impression that a man receives is registered in that wonderful brain of his like music on a phonographic record—the scent of roses or mignonette, the touch of iron or sandstone, the sound of breaking glass or running water. Often the record is a bad one and of small value, but if it is cut deep enough it will last a lifetime. Bandage the eyes of a sighted man, a woman and a child. Give the first a plug of tobacco and a bit of soap, the second a bit of silk and a bit of wool, the third a marble and a wooden bead. How much time will they need to distinguish each? Not one second. When you come to think of it, it seems wonderful how few things there are for which we actually need eyes. Two weeks after I became blind I could wash, shave, dress and eat just as quickly and handily as I was ever able to do, except for the cutting up of meat and the occasional dropping of scraps, and this even was as much carelessness as inability. Not long ago I called with a companion at the house of a mutual friend.

Remembered Brain Records

While we were waiting in the drawing-room my companion picked up an object from the chimney piece and exclaimed: "I wonder what in the world this is. I can't make it out at all." He handed it to me.

"That's half a coconut shell," I replied. "It was polished by Jack while he was in Florida."

Now my eyes had never beheld this object, for it was cut and polished a year after I lost my sight; but several months previous I had held it in my hand for half a minute, and now I remembered the touch in an instant. Moreover, when this article was first placed in my hands I instantly recognized it as a polished coconut shell, though I had never touched one before. I knew it by the shape and weight, because several times in my life I have held half shells in my hands and they made a good brain record.

There is nothing remarkable in all this. It is perfectly natural and commonplace. But it always surprises sighted people who have been so occupied with looking at things that they scarcely realize they possess a sense of touch or think of it merely as a clever means of saving them from burning their fingers. As yet I am but an inexperienced blind man. Those of long habit do things infinitely more remarkable. As men grow older in blindness the senses of touch, taste, smell and hearing often become miraculously acute. I know a man who while walking along a business street can tell a shoe store by the smell of leather, a butcher shop by the scent of blood or a grocery by the odor of spices or dried fish. He says, also, that he can detect a dry-goods store or even a bookstore by the faint odors which emanate from its merchandise.

I know all kinds of blind people who can do all kinds of astonishing things and do them well. I know one blind woman who employs a blind cook, and finds her perfectly satisfactory. I know numbers of blind women who do all their own housework. I know blind stenographers who take dictation in raised signs at the rate of one hundred and twenty words a minute, and transcribe it themselves. I know blind girls who take dictation from a dictating machine and transcribe it as rapidly and accurately as other typists do. I know a blind man who assembles hand trucks in a large factory, and who does more work in a day than any sighted man in his department. I know of another who assembles electric compensator switches, which are very complicate in construction. They are about as big as a typewriter and weigh one hundred and ten pounds.

I could fill pages with accounts of blind people who use the sense of touch combined with a clever brain to do good work and often surpass the sighted shopmates beside them.

I remained in my Florida camp four months, and I enjoyed it. I could not see the grass or the foliage or the clouds, but I could make pictures in my mind almost as good as the realities, and there were the sounds of the air and the water and trees to make them true. Often I made imaginary trips in my canoe through wild water ways that I remembered well or through canals and lakelets crowded with pleasure craft. In my mind I could see every turn of the winding way, every bridge and inlet, the trees that stood conspicuous among their fellows, even the faces of the people in the passing craft.

Learning Braille

I had curious optical delusions, especially in the evening hours. Sometimes it seemed as though I were walking on an endless carpet of red-tan color with little green shrubs growing in a pattern. Sometimes the roof and walls of my big white tent seemed to be covered with playing cards, the red-and-white backs turned out and lying at every conceivable angle. When I had looked at this for a moment myriads of brilliant green flies would appear flying madly between me and the cards. On one or two nights I was rather startled by a row of perfectly formed faces, ear to ear, stretching across the tent about eight feet from where I lay. They were terra-cotta faces with jet-black hair, and the character of each face was totally different from its neighbor, and very strongly marked. There were pirates with fierce beards and earrings, mustachioed brigands, soldiers, turbaned Turks, Moorish dancing girls, Malay sailors. Nearly all the faces were of Oriental type, and there was something wicked and sinister in all. After seeing this display once I went into the city and saw an oculist. I wanted to know if I was getting a new form of delirium tremens induced by the Florida water or if, perchance, it was the beginning of insanity.

"No," said the doctor. "Nothing at all. Doesn't mean anything that I know of. You fellows with bad eyes are always seeing things. It isn't a symptom of anything. Forget it."

Only a few days ago, while this article was still incomplete, I met a blind man who told me that such visions had come to him for seven years after his loss of sight. He specialized in statuary—Greek goddesses in Parian marble, Moorish soldiers in colors, and Arab sheiks in bronze. These figures were so real that he often put out his hand to touch them and was disappointed when he felt nothing. Sometimes he saw pictures conventionally framed—sometimes water, trees or mountains, sometimes house interiors magnificently furnished. For the six months last past no visions had come to him and he was sorry to lose them.

So I went back to camp, and when my pirates came to stare I returned their stare indifferently and hied them back to limbo. After a while they ceased to come. The green flies flew no more, but occasionally I still see my tan carpet with its green shrubbery.

I now plunged deeper into the task which is the hope or the despair of every new-blind adult—the wonderful system of raised printing invented by the blind son of a French saddler, Louis Braille, of memory blessed by thousands to whom it has brought happiness, and cursed by other thousands to whom it has brought nothing but the bitterness of failure. A newly blinded soldier running his hand over one of its pages exploded disgustedly, "Aw, it feels just like a sheet of sandpaper." There are many to whom it never feels like anything else.

When Louis Braille was a little lad he amused himself by punching holes in scraps

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WHAT IT IS LIKE TO BE BLIND

(Continued from Page 11)

The waiting was long, but there was nothing to do but wait. The cataract would get thicker and thicker, and the world blacker and blacker until it disappeared. Then the doctors would use their knives. After that I might see once more; or I might never see again. There was no certainty. Ten years before, my mother, whose eyes were like mine, died—blind. The surgeon's knife had done it. The surgeon might do the same for me. My one eye was not a promising one.

If this were a tale like some of those that Mr. Kipling used to write I should now describe the mental tortures through which I passed, my struggles to accomplish something great before the darkness closed in forever. But this story is a true one, and I must confess that I did nothing of the kind. There were no mental horrors. My condition gave me very little concern. I thought little about it, and when I did think it was with a careless hope that all would come right in the end. I went to Florida by myself and set up glorious big tents with stoves, floors, furniture and all the comforts of a home. I lived alone, like a hermit; read, wrote, cooked and kept the camp neat. I could not see far enough to shoot, but I could feel the tug of a fish at my line's end—and get him. I could cast a shrimp net and operate a trap for crabs. My tents were overshadowed by giant oaks. There was blue water at the right and left and in front of me.

Every night I watched the red sun going down behind the water; every morning I saw the edge of it rise above the horizon on the other side of my world. I bathed while the morning sky was still yellow. I lolled in a hammock when the sun was high. I nosed along the shore in my canoe as it sloped to the west, and when the last red rays darkened I turned in between my blankets and waited for it to rise again. These were happy, glorious days, and in them I forgot the dark shadow of the impending future.

I lived that life for nearly two years. Then I came back to the North. Something great had happened. The President had proclaimed a state of war with Germany, and the country was in feverish preparation. And something else had happened, great to me if not to all humanity. Away over on the other side of the world—in Asia—a surgeon had discovered a new operation which might restore in a month the sight which had been fading for so many years. Three American surgeons had traveled over seas and mountains, like pilgrims to Mecca, and had brought it back with them. I investigated, I was advised, I embraced the idea. I traveled alone to the Windy City, found my way unaided to the hospital, breakfasted without assistance, read the morning paper, though with difficulty. I lay down upon the operating table. I felt the cocaine as it entered the eye, and the cleansing stream that followed it. There was a curious pearly shimmering, and then it was over.

"Gentlemen," said the surgeon, "when you tackle an eye with eighteen diopters of myopia, and get a result like this, you have reason to be thankful."

I thought that if the surgeon had cause to be thankful I had better cause, and I was thankful.

During the three weeks that followed, lying with bandaged eyes, I made a hundred plans—plans that I had not dared think of for years. I was a bachelor. I was filled with life, filled with the capacity for pleasure, filled with the capacity for work. The world, which had been closing in on me for so long, now seemed opening out before me into glowing vistas of happiness and success. For three weeks this dream lasted. Then, one Friday morning in July, 1917, the surgeon told me very quietly that the operation had proved a failure, and that henceforth I was a blind man. For a minute I said nothing; just sat there on my bedside and watched my glittering horizon fade into blackness.

An End of Worry

"Couldn't you have lied a little, just for a few days more?" I asked.

"No," he said; "I'm a bad liar."

I don't want to talk or write about the next twenty-four hours. I don't like to think about them. I kept quiet. I asked no sympathy from anybody, and nobody offered me any. It wouldn't have helped.

At the end of the twenty-four hours I said to myself: "It's bad to be blind, but it's worse to be crazy. I must get a reader."

A girl from the Y. W. C. A. came to me two hours later. She read me some magazine articles. I picked out a few problems and fixed my mind on them, fixed it as a bulldog fixes its teeth in his enemy's throat. The next day was Sunday. My reader was to come at one o'clock. At twelve I dined, then lay down to wait. She did not come at one. For an hour I hung onto the ragged edge of despair. If that woman didn't come, how could I carry through another day? She came at two.

I listened to a story from THE SATURDAY EVENING POST. Then I dictated a humorous article—an imitation of Mr. Dooley. I had to spell out the dialect for her, and she had to repeat each word. That was some stunt. I forgot all about Fate. From that moment until the present, as I sit here at my typewriter hammering out this story in words that I cannot see and on keys that I can only feel—from that moment Fate has never given me an hour's uneasiness.

Next day the surgeon came back from a fishing trip and told me that I had not perfectly understood him. He had once known a boy of fourteen who had rallied from a condition like mine, and if so-and-so happened and such-and-such a state ensued, I might perhaps—and so on and so forth. My best plan would be to stay in hospital under observation until some more definite change, and so on. And I must stay very quiet, and avoid worry, and it was necessary that I should lie on my back as much as I possibly could.

Well, I did lie on my back and I didn't worry. Worrying was never my specialty. I knew I was going to have enough to eat for the rest of my life, and a reasonably warm place to sleep. I was a bachelor. There was nobody in the world dependent upon me. So I reflected that I was an extremely fortunate person. There are hundreds of newly blinded men who find no such comfort in their thoughts—men who are penniless; men who can see no way of earning a future livelihood; men who have a dread—perhaps an absurd dread—of poorhouses; men who have children to provide for; men who wonder despairingly what their wives will do when the pinch comes. In our present-day fiction wives under such conditions are always faithful. Editors would not allow anything else; but in the story of blindness it is not invariably so. I know of several blind men whose only memento of a happy home is a judgment of divorce, and one or two whose wives have gone off with other men without even that formality.

In the ward close to my room at the hospital was a young railroad worker whose sight was hanging in the balance of fate. His wife had not written him even a postal card since the day he left home. He had sent letters to her, but no answer came. He got leave of absence from the hospital to go home and find if she were dead or had deserted him. She was quite comfortable when he reached their little home, but had been busy, and one of the children had mumps. I would not have banked much on that woman's faithfulness in time of stress.

From pangs like this I was free. I lay on my back and did not worry. Great misfortunes, of which God has sent my share, never worried me. It was always a small thing that wakened me of nights—the injuries and injustices that may not be deadly but that gall like a cocklebur under a mustang's saddle.

My girl reader read all day. I hoped a little, but not much. I inquired about blind people, their methods and education. I heard an article written by a woman who had become famous as a teacher of blind adults. She told of strong men weeping on her hands as she guided their fingers over

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While I had been handling Chapman my partner, Doc Leroy, had laid the rest of the plans. He had employed three temporary conspirators, whom he had picked up from his large acquaintance in the Chicago underworld. Two were women past fifty; the other a hard but innocent-looking young crook. One of the women was provided with a certificate for eleven thousand shares of stock, which paper was carefully spotted with acid and made to look time-worn. The other woman held similar certificates for eighty-five hundred shares in three lots. The young crook had three certificates also, each for five thousand shares. Finally Doc Leroy himself played the leading rôle. He took lodgings in an Oak Park boarding house, where he passed himself off as a retired physician, a part as natural to him as the rôle of business man to me. So the actors were all prepared. We waited only for the entrance of the hero.

Peter Chapman had been properly appraised by Old Man Robinson. He had one great weakness; one deep fault. The moment he had his hands on money made without effort out of a stock transaction his cold old head began to burn and leap with wild dreams of huge unearned rewards. I sat up half a night with him while he went over and over fanciful figures and calculations mounting higher every time he went over them. Greed was fairly eating the old man's senses out. For just a moment I wondered whether the thing might not upset the old fellow's reason and defeat us at the very climax.

Chapman Falls for It

Next morning I met him at six o'clock. Heaven only knows what he wanted with me at that hour! He was simply insatiable. We were in his bank before the clerks had wiped the sleep out of their eyes. Chapman drew an even hundred thousand dollars from two accounts and we set out in a rented motor car to call first on the old doctor in Oak Park.

Doctor Talmadge—otherwise Leroy—greeted us in the little parlor of his boarding house, a very decrepit, soft-minded, garrulous old fellow. We inquired whether he still held some Arroyo stock which he had got years before. The old physician smiled childishly, rubbed his thin hands and began an endless narration. Ten years before he had attended a mining man who had a serious ailment and the patient not having any money had given him this stock. Wasn't it wonderful? He had tried to sell it everywhere, but no one would give a penny for it. He had put it away into an old tin box with his birth certificate and his marriage papers and some old love letters and had forgotten about it years ago. Wasn't it strange? Now it was suddenly valuable and was going to make his last years comfortable. He gushed away like all the old fools he was not. I, who understood, admired his acting, but I could see Peter Chapman's contempt for a man younger [illegible] the driver to top speed with oaths and promises. We rushed back to Chapman's bank, where he drew more money, and immediately charged off to find the other holders of Arroyo stock. We feverishly paid out our money and hurried away with the stock, thirty-four thousand five hundred shares more in the beautiful Arroyo.

Curiously enough as we drove off from each successive house I thought I saw Doc Leroy in the act of entering. Was it possible that he distrusted his new-made confederates and felt it wise to be exceeding prompt in his collections?

At three o'clock that afternoon I drove a weary but triumphant Peter Chapman back to his office in the stockyards and saw him tuck his stock tenderly away in his great iron safe.

"Well, that cost us a pretty penny," said he.

"How much?"

"A hundred and twenty-six thousand five hundred."

"I didn't think it would take quite that much," I ventured apologetically.

"Never mind," said he sharply. "How much'll we get for it?"

"Five dollars a share—no less."

"What makes you think so?"

"That man that was ahead of us yesterday undoubtedly was trying to buy the stock for the New York crowd. He had no idea we were on his heels and thought he could take his time. Pretty rough on them, eh?" And I took occasion to laugh.

"You think they need our stock that bad?"

"They must have it or we own the mine," said I.

Old Peter Chapman mused on this.

"We might keep the mine, at that," he said after a while.

"Not for me," I objected.

"And why not?"

"Mines are risky—stock selling is sure."

"Maybe you're right," he admitted. "Well, then, how're we gonna get five dollars a share?"

"Send me to New York," said I, "with authority to dicker and I'll get the best price I can. Personally my advice is to get five a share or hold on for a while, but you can do as you like."

"When can you start? To-night?" said the impatient old man of greed.

"If you say so."

"Get ready," said he.

And he sat down again with his pencil and began to calculate the profit on eighty-four thousand five hundred shares of stock bought at an average of a dollar and a half and sold at five.

"Good-by," I said when I had got myself together.

The old man looked up at me from his calculations and hemmed.

"By the way," he said with that hard cold twinkle of his, "twenty per cent of this profit will be nearly sixty thousand dollars. That's enough fer ya. Anyway, it's all I'll give ya."

The Old Way

The New Way

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of leather with his father's awl. One day the awl slipped and put out his eye. Afterward he became totally blind. But he thought a great deal of the marks his awl left in the leather, and at last he got the idea of punching the awl only part way through so that it left a little lump on the other side instead of a hole. Then he arranged those lumps into groups, and each group stood for a letter or syllable. One of the Braille characters is made with six dots. You can get a model of it by taking six tiniest glass beads and arranging them in twos making a group of three dots high and two dots wide. It stands for the syllable "for." There are about eighty other characters, representing words or syllables or punctuation marks, each being made by removing one or more beads from that little group of six. If you remove the bead from the top right corner you make the letter "x." Replace it, and remove the bead from the lower right-hand corner. That makes "q." Replace it and remove the three right-hand dots. That leaves three beads standing one above the other. That signifies "l." Take away all but the top left-hand bead, and it makes "a."

In May I shot northward again for another month among the blind men at the state institute, and then home to spend the summer months. It was a pleasant summer. I worked with my typewriter and my books. I made progress. I walked much and hard in quiet avenues with their wide lawns and spreading foliage. I could still perceive my yellows, blues and greens, with occasional flashes of pale red. It was of no real value. The objects before me were shapeless or false in outline. Sometimes—once or twice a week, perhaps, when the light fell on just the right spot with just the right strength—I caught the faint glimmer of a human face. I could not see the features, but it was a face, and it was good to see even that much. The sunlight was still with me, and at night the street lamps glaring oddly in grotesque shapes, but one could not feel quite alone with lights in view. Could I have kept even as much sight as this it would have been a grand thing, but the time was fast approaching when even this glimmer of vision was to leave me.

The Compensations of Blindness

The doctors had made promises that if certain things happened they could restore my sight. They were very long chances—one in a hundred or two in a hundred chances that required almost miracles to realize. The miracles happened, nevertheless. The long chances won, but as each dream came true an unforeseen evil rose up and shattered it. It seemed as though Fate were standing over my felled body bludgeoning me back to earth whenever I dared to raise my head. There were months in hospital, operation after operation, months of confinement to sick rooms; then, at last, blank, irrevocable blindness.

This may seem gloomy to many people—to some perhaps a bit terrible, but it isn't. The reality is not so bad as the picture, even though the picture is true. Such things are terrible in the expectation, but when one feels them and realizes them the terrors vanish. There is something in the heart and soul of man that strengthens him against misfortune, even disaster.

When Thomas Cranmer was burned at the stake in Smithfield Market he was able to hold out his right hand and watch it roasting in the hottest flame. He was able to cry out to his burning comrade: "Be of good cheer, brother, we shall to-day kindle a torch that shall never be extinguished." While the fire was actually eating him up that man was able to derive satisfaction in the thought that he was defeating his enemies, even while they were destroying him. I scarcely realized my blindness before I began to realize the satisfaction of overcoming it by learning new ways to beat my adversary and cheat him of his victory. Misfortune never crushes until its victim submits.

After all, there is much time in which men do not use their eyes, and so do not miss the use of them when they cease to see. There are, for example, the eight hours which a man should spend in bed—one-third of the entire day. When a man is asleep or dozing he is as well off as if he had all the eyes of Argus. Then there are the meal hours. A man needs no eyes to find the way to his mouth, and he soon learns to gather food with a spoon or fork. Then there are the hours he passes before the fire or in the summer gloaming thinking. One needs no eyes to think. In fact, there are twelve or fifteen hours each day during which the blind man does not miss his lost vision, when he is as well off as his sighted neighbor.

Also, it is good to remember that the loss of sight is the loss of only one sense—one-fifth of our equipment. There are four senses left. The blind man can enjoy the taste of a good dinner as much as though each of his eyes was a telescope. He can enjoy the scent of roses or the odors of the forest. He can thrill at the sound of music, or the voice of the orator, or the touch of a loved one; in fact, the blind man can enjoy music far more than can sighted people. The great orchestra with its hundred instruments plays for him alone. He has no eye to cock at the diamonds in the boxes. Inappropriate dresses or dull faces do not irk him. He does not see the struggling performers, their sawing arms, distended cheeks and goggling eyes. No man winks, no woman smiles at him to distract his thoughts. He is alone in the great theater, all his being absorbed in the tidal wave of melody. He experiences something that men with eyes can scarcely guess at.

Unlovely Things Unseen

Multiply these experiences many times and there are still more emotions which the blind man can find and feel. The loss of sight spurs him on to new discoveries in unguessed realms of sensibility. But to half the men who become blind the loss of sight means little more than the impairment of the power of getting money. What did they see with those eyes which in fancy they valued so highly? To most of them there was little but dirty streets lined with ugly houses, sitting rooms furnished with red plush, men in shabby clothing, women with repulsive hats, bad pictures, mongrel dogs, cheap novels and Sunday comics. The daily vision of these things hurts men's souls. But for the necessities of study and labor it would be almost as well that men should pluck out their eyes than that they should go on insulting their minds with the sordid pictures that illustrate their daily lives.

Of course there are pictures of real beauty and worth, but how many look at them? Or if they do look how many understand or profit? Men watch the splendid procession of the clouds as though they were coal carts in a dirty street. They watch a sunset that would make an artist gasp, and approve it as they might a bit of plaid ribbon. Lovers see the silver radiance of a summer moon and remark between kisses that it's a pretty night. To these people eyesight is chiefly useful to work with. When men lose it they do not really miss much except at the desk or the workbench, and in these days men learn to work without eyes. I am writing these very words on a typewriter which I cannot see. Before my eyes there is the semblance of a snowbank, nothing more. But beneath it is the typewriter. I can feel the keys, and my fingers are working fast. My sense of sight is gone, but the sense of touch has taken its place.

I could write books on the charm of blindness. There are so many things which bring suffering to the sighted but leave the blind unruffled, serene. The sighted man looks at his mirror and sees his face seared and ravaged by age. The blind man is always young. The sighted man watches his wife's beauty fade, and sees the lines of care and sickness growing on his children's faces. The wife of the blind man is beautiful to the end, and the sad faces of his children do not touch him. It is the sights of poverty that cut most deeply, but those sights do not cut the blind. Threadbare clothing, frazzled furniture, paintless woodwork—do not irk those whose sight is gone. Most men eat with their eyes, and a bad dinner offends their vision. The blind man, seeing nothing of greasy meat and watery vegetables, almost forgets that the flavor of these things is evil. The fine house, the splendid clothing, the handsome equipage of his neighbor are invisible to the blind, and what the eye does not see the heart does not yearn for. So the blind man is spared the pangs of envy. A gathering of blind people is the happiest gathering on earth, because jealousy does not exist there. Among the blind there is the truest equality in the world, and a tranquillity of mind such as sighted men cannot fathom.

Sometimes blind people come in for pleasures which are entirely denied to those with sight. Quite lately, while this article was still unfinished, I made my way through snowy streets to the house of a friend, an artist of Continental reputation, with whom I designed to pass the evening. I rang three times without response, then greatly disappointed turned again into the snow. I was fifty yards down the street when I heard my friend's voice shouting that I should come back. I found him in the doorway in his pyjamas.

"Been up late for seven nights," he explained. "Just thought we'd turn in. Heard your row. Didn't guess who it was till you stumbled on the steps."

While talking he dragged me in, deaf to my protests. His wife hailed me from an upper floor: "I'll be down in a minute. Glad you came," she cried.

"Don't dress," I shouted back. "I'll just imagine you in a dinner gown."

In five minutes we were seated in front of an open fire, my host in his dressing gown and my charming hostess in a bedroom wrapper, and we passed a happy jolly evening, with things to eat and drink besides. Now what married pair would or could have treated a sighted man like that?

But if I should tell all the happiness of the blind I should make the reader forget the hardships that are always present though sometimes forgotten. The handicap may be surmounted, but can never be removed. The blind man at his workbench often surpasses the sighted comrade who works beside him, but he does so for only one reason—that he is the better man. He would be his comrade's master had he sight to help him. The blind man must always take a lower place than he would be entitled to were his other powers assisted by the ally, sight. But that should not cause unhappiness. The blind must cultivate contentment, and doing his best and being contented he cannot help being happy, except, perhaps, for two things. Those are the almost savage indifference of most employers, who, having work to give, will not let the blind even try to do it; and the cold selfishness of some friends or relatives who withhold from them those kindly offices which measure all the distance between joy and misery. These are the twin curses of the blind. Strong men overcome them, but they crush the weak. This world is so full of men who dislike the weak and unfortunate, and in this respect the strongest and most successful are sometimes the deepest sinners.

The weakness of others seems to reproach them with their own strength; the failure of others reproaches them with their own success. It suggests duties that they do not want to take up, and the suggestion annoys them. They are often willing to give and do if not pressed, but when the urge of sympathy comes such men reject it almost with anger. Look at Andrew Carnegie, the very type and exemplar of strength and success. He gave three hundred and fifty million dollars to buy books for sighted readers, most of whom were able to buy their own books. Blind people cannot possibly buy the books they read, because a book that costs little more than twenty-five cents in ink print costs almost twenty-five dollars in raised print. The blind have few books. The need of more and better ones is a dire need. But when blind people asked Carnegie for books he refused to provide them. Substitute the word "work" for "books" and you find the industrial world full of Carnegies who push their employment on sighted people who do not want it and refuse it to blind men who are able to do it and bave bitter need of it.

An Appeal to Employers

Each summer hundreds of blind youths leave their schools, educated, hand and head, to fight the battle of life, but to reach the fighting line is almost impossible. They trudge from factory to factory, from shop to shop, begging employment, and again and again the opportunity to work is refused. The stronger ones sometimes force their way through. The weaker drift into poorhouses or state workshops or beg on the streets. In several cities salaried officials are employed to obtain work for the blind. These have many a discouraging tale to tell of the indifference they meet among employers of labor. Not all the business and industrial world is of the Carnegie stripe. There are men of heart and of vision who give employment to blind workers, and who profit by it, because the work of blind men is good work. Perhaps you employ men, Mister Reader? If so, in which class do you stand?

When after six months of confinemen I took my first walk as a complete an finished blind man I found things a bi harder. By day the glimmer of the sidewalk and by night the glare of street lamps had given me a sense of direction if nothing more, but now I was like a compassless ship on an uncharted sea. All directions—north, south, east and west—were one to me. I strayed over edges of walks, I thumped down off curbs. I took wrong turns and lost myself. Often I bumped into trees that grew too close to the walk. There was a letter box on one corner that I never could get by. I hit that box so hard and so often that I loosened the iron stanchion where it stood deep buried in the earth. Blind men whom I met told me that as time passed I would sense these obstructions as I approached them. They give back an echo too faint for common ears, but audible to the delicate hearing of the blind.

The Coming of a New Sense

There is, too, a mysterious something which warns a blind man of his danger, but which be cannot understand. Some think it is an ever so delicate pressure of the air. There is really no knowing what it is, but if, for instance, you were to take a tea tray and hold it two feet from a blind man's face he would shrink away, knowing it was there, but not knowing how he knew. I am too young in the business of blindness to avoid collisions with such objects, but I begin to feel the sense growing in me, and with time it will develop. Also, the crossing of streets was a problem, because the blind walker just naturally bears away to the left. If he was in an open space he would go round in a circle as hunters do who are lost in a forest. But in the city he merely misses the opposite walk and wanders about in midstreet until some kind pedestrian sets him right.

I had narrow escapes from walking down area stairs. Once or twice I ambled into busy thoroughfares and caused heart throbs among speeding chauffeurs, who blew their horns and cursed violently. But in all cases I came safely through. Each experience was a warning, and I took good care not to repeat it. In the beginning it required some nerve, some resolution to push forward into this world of unseen things, but it soon became familiar. I ceased to lose myself. I no longer walked into dangers. I marched with head up like a soldier where I knew the way. Where I did not know it I walked more cautiously, but I walked. In other respects I never felt the added handicap of total blindness.

It is more than two years since the surgeon's knife cut away my vision. Half that time has been spent in hospitals and sick rooms. So it may be said that I have had but one year's experience in the active life of a blind learner and worker. In that time I have learned to write more freely and accurately on a typewriter than I was ever able to do when I possessed my sight. I have learned to read with my fingers in two different system of raised type, the American Braille and the British Braille. I have learned again to play the piano so as to occupy myself and give pleasure to listeners of uncultivated taste. I can feed myself, dress myself and do the self-services which normal men perform. Time never hangs heavy on my hands, because it is fully occupied. My mind is more active and fruitful, and I enjoy my thoughts more than ever before.

And besides all this—for the second time since my sight began to fail me—I have come back. Three months after I took that first walk as a man totally blind I traveled alone to Canada, and at the international convention of blind folk acted as correspondent for six of the greatest newspapers in America. I wrote with my own hands on a disabled typewriter more than fifteen columns of matter. The newspapers used it and paid me their highest space rates. I did that work in the face of difficulties which would have seemed mountainous when I had eyes to serve me. Since that day I have had two short stories published in American monthly magazines. And here I am again, back once more, and this time back to stay.

So this is the message I have to give to the blinded soldiers of America and to the friends who advise and sustain them: Keep on working, keep on trying. Keep looking for new things to replace the old things you have lost. Never stop. Keep going, and you will win at last.

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